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ABSTRACT

The study is an in-process report and constitutes a step in a series of studies oriented toward developing a comprehensive understanding of the work and work arrangements of public school administrators in settings which are particularly suited for such studies. The settings chosen for the present study were three school districts with student enrollments between 100 and 400 students located in one county in a Pacific Northwest state. As a step toward realizing the purpose of the series of studies, the present study had four purposes. The first three were to determine at first level of approximation: (1) what tasks constitute the work of administrators in small rural school districts; (2) how the work of administration is divided among administrators; and (3) what environmental and organizational factors condition the quality, division, and stability of administrative work. The fourth purpose was to develop and refine a theoretical framework for the study which is useful in relating the nature, distribution, and stabilization of administrative work in small rural schools. Consistent with the research purposes, a qualitative field research methodology was utilized. The report of the study presents and analyzes field data consistent with the purposes of the study. (Author/AH)

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THE WORK AND WORK ARRANGEMENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: AN IN-PROCESS REPORT OF A FIELD STUDY OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACTS

This study is an in-process report and constitutes a step in a series of studies oriented toward developing a comprehensive understanding of the work and work arrangements of public school administrators in settings which are particularly suited for such studies. These settings are small, rural school districts with student enrollments between 100 and 400 students. As a step toward realizing the purpose of the series of studies, the present study had four purposes. The first three are to determine at a first level of approximation: (1) What tasks constitute the work of administrators in small, rural school districts; (2) how the work of administration is divided among administrators; and (3) what environmental and organizational factors condition the quality, division, and stability of administrative work. The fourth purpose was to develop and refine a theoretical framework for the study which is useful in relating the nature, distribution, and stabilization of administrative work in small, rural schools. Consistent with the research purposes, a qualitative field research methodology was utilized. The report of the study presents and analyzes field data consistent with the purposes of the study.

THE WORK AND WORK ARRANGEMENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: AN IN-PROCESS REPORT OF A FIELD STUDY OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS

The tasks which constitute the work of administrators have been and continue to be a perennial theme in the literature concerned with management, administration, and organizations (Barnard, 1968; Machiavelli, 1952; Simon, 1976). With respect to the administration of public schools, a variety of studies have been conducted which focus on the work associated with and the the roles of various administrative positions. For example, Gross, Mason, and McEachern (1958) studied the role of the school superintendent. Wolcott (1973) conducted an ethnographic study focusing on the elementary school principalship. Austin and Brown (1970) investigated the work and roles of secondary assistant principals. Notwithstanding the number of studies examining the work and roles of various administrative positions in public schools, the majority of these studies have tended to focus on a single administrative position in isolation with respect to other administrative positions within a school district.

Some research has been conducted which gives indications of the work arrangement among school administrators. For example, McGivney and Haught (1972) studied the work arrangements among central office staff members in a school district. Iannaccone (1962), as part of a large study, examined the formal interactions between central office administrators and school principals. Summerfield (1971), in his study of the neighborhood-based politics experienced by elementary school principals, does, to a limited extent, explore the work arrangements which exist between elementary school principals and certain central office administrators. Similarly, parts

of Wolcott's (1973) study are concerned with the work relationships between elementary school principals and the superintendent in a school district.

Although some research has been conducted which addresses both the nature of the work of school administrators and the nature of work arrangements among school administrators, little specific attention has been given to this area of research in the literature concerned with public school administration. While the specific reasons for the absence of research which focuses simultaneously on the nature of the work of school administrators and the work arrangements among administrators in a district are not known with certainty, there are several related reasons which likely account for the limited contributions. First, most research concerning the work roles of school administrators has been conducted in urban and suburban settings. In these areas, the number of administrators is large and, hence, poses problems for comprehensive studies. Secondly, in large, and even medium-size school districts, administration tends to be finely divided into specialized areas. Investigating the nature and distribution of administrative tasks in a complex system poses considerable research problems, both practical and theoretical. And, finally administrators in suburban and urban districts tend to be geographically dispersed which makes examining work arrangements difficult.

Purpose of the Study

This study is an in-process report and constitutes a second step in a series of studies oriented toward developing a comprehensive understanding of the work and work arrangements of public school administrators in settings which are particularly suited for such studies. These settings are small, rural school districts with student enrollments between 100

and 400 students. Typically, small, rural school districts have few administrators, and these administrators work in close proximity to one another.

The purpose of the series of studies is threefold. First, the studies propose to investigate the nature of the work and the nature of the division of work which exists among the line administrators in small, rural school districts. In this instance, the term line administrators refers to superintendents and principals. Secondly, the studies propose to identify relevant variables within two categories of factors--organizational and environmental--which condition: (1) The nature of administrative work; (2) the division of work; and (3) the stabilization of work and division of work. The final purpose of the series of studies is to develop a grounded theory which relates the nature, distribution, and stabilization of administrative work with organizational and environmental factors.

As a step toward realizing the overall purpose of the series of studies, the present study has four purposes. The first three are to determine at a first level of approximation: (1) What tasks constitute the work of administrators in small, rural school districts; (2) how the work of administration is divided among administrators; and (3) what environmental and organizational factors condition the quality, division, and stability of administrative work. The fourth purpose is to develop and refine a theoretical framework for the study which is useful in relating the nature, distribution, and stabilization of administrative work in small, rural schools.

Research Methodology and Procedures

Research Methodology

The study reported here is oriented to describing and analyzing the qualities of the work of, and the qualities of the work arrangements among rural school administrators and to describing and analyzing the qualities of the environmental and organizational factors which condition the adminins-trators' work. Consistent with the nature of the research purposes, a qualitative field research methodology is being utilized (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lutz and Iannaccone, 1969; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973).

Research Procedures

Study Sample

The sample of rural school administrators (and their associated school districts) to be included in the study was selected to meet, as closely as possible, a number of criteria. Some of these were theoretical in nature (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and were established for the purpose of clearly focusing the study and of establishing a priori comparisons within the sample. Other criteria were practical in character and were established to minimize research time and costs.

Within the theoretical domain were five important selection criteria. First, school districts within the sample must have student enrollments of 500 or less. Second, the districts must be in a rural setting; that is not within a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). Third, the districts must include grade levels kindergarten through twelfth grades. Fourth, the districts must have at least three administrators. One must be a district superintendent; at least two others must be school princi-pals, each in charge of only one school. Within each district, one school

must be an elementary school, the other must be a secondary school. And fifth, the school districts selected must be located within only one state.

For practical purposes, the study sample must be selected so as to minimize travel and data collection costs. Additionally, in order to insure sufficient depth and breadth of field data, three different sites (districts) must be included in the sample. Applying the fourth theoretical criteria above, the districts in combination must have a total of at least nine administrators.

Within the parameters of the sampling criteria, the administrators in three rural school districts located in one county in a Pacific Northwest state were selected for inclusion in the present study. Each of the districts had three administrators. The administrators in each district included a district superintendent and two school principals; one principal was in charge of an elementary school, and the other was in charge of a high school. The student enrollments in the districts selected were 200, 220, and 250 respectively. Table 1 and Table 2 contain a summary of relevant district and school data.

Data Collection

Progressing with the series of studies, data collection has been accomplished in three phases. The first phase involved contacting the superintendents of the districts selected in order to explain the purposes of the study, seeking their voluntary participation, and gaining permission to contact principals. Following brief explanations, all three superintendents agreed to participate in the study. Furthermore, they allowed their school principals to be contacted. After brief conversations with the principals, all agreed to participate.

District	Superintendent	Student Enrollment	Budget	Teachers, Number of	Support Staff, Number of
Lowery	Mr. Ritter	200	$892,000	15	12
Temple	Mr. Wallace	220	$791,000	19 1/2	10
Sunny Junction	Mr. James	250	$987,000	20	20

Table 1

District Data (The numbers on the table must be regarded as approximate. Some figures have been rounded off for convenience; others vary depending on how the category is defined.)

District	Elementary School Level				High School Level			
	Principal	Grade Levels	Student Enrollment	Teachers, Number of	Principal	Grade Levels	Student Enrollment	Teachers, Number of
Lowery	Mr. Larson	K-8	135	9	Mr. Smith	9-12	65	6
Temple	Mr. Richards	K-6	110	10	Mr. Johnson	7-12	110	9 1/2
Sunny Junction	Mr. Charles	K-8	165	10 1/2	Mr. Foster	9-12	85	9 1/2

Table 2

School Data by District (The numbers on the table must be regarded as approximate. Some figures have been rounded off for convenience; others vary depending on how the category is defined.)

In the second phase, individual interviews were scheduled and conducted with each of the nine administrators in the three school districts. The semi-structured, open-ended interviews varied in length from one hour to two and one-half hours. During the interviews, notes were recorded; following the interviews various documents were collected. Several hours following the interviews, the field notes were reviewed by the researcher and sometimes expanded.

The third phase of the study has concentrated on gathering field data in a single school district, namely Lowery. Data involving this site includes transcripts from interviews, both formal and informal, and field notes of participant-observation activities. Field work at the Lowery site spanned a four month period during which time several hundred pages of field notes were recorded and numerous documents collected.

Limitations of the Study

Since the study is still in progress, a variety of limitations of the present report might legitimately be cited. However, only one important limitation will be briefly discussed. This limitation stems from the uneven quantity of data collected at the three research sites. On the one hand, indepth interview data has been collected at each of the three research sites. These data provide a relatively broad, yet not particularly deep, source of comparative data among the three sites. On the other hand, participant-observation data has been collected at only one site. These data provides a relatively deep, yet narrow, source of data for one of the three sites. Considering the broadly based interview data and the narrowly focused participant-obseration data, the question of internal reliability (Le Compte & Goetz, 1982) of the research at the present stage

of progress must be acknowledged as an important limitation in the present report.

The School Districts: Their Setting, Organization, and Administration

The Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction school districts are located in towns with the same names as the schools and in a county known for its abundant wheat production. The rich, deep top soil, cold dark winters, damp springs, bright mildly hot summers, and variable falls make the county particularly suited for wheat farming. It is fair to say that virtually all of the wheat production in the county is destined for foreign markets. According to residents in the towns, the average yield per acre is one of the highest in the world, and no one can remember a year when there was a crop failure.

The farms which produce the wheat are family enterprises. Over the years with the development of bigger and more sophisticated farming machinery, the farms have become larger in size. With the continued refinement of farm machinery, the need for manpower has continually been reduced. Hence, the population of the towns and their surrounding areas have gradually decreased over several decades. For the Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction School Districts this has meant a slow, yet continual decline in student enrollments.

The towns of Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction are modest, tidy places. The prominant features in each of the towns are the tall and massive grain elevators located on railroad spurs. Along the single block main streets are a market or two, a grange supply store, a gas station, a cafe, several taverns, and a branch of the United States Post Office.

In addition to the businesses on the main streets, there are a number of unoccupied stores which have "For Rent" signs taped to the interiors of dusty windows. The vacant buildings include former car dealerships, theaters, restaurants, markets, and the like. The decline in the need for retail space in the towns is in part a reflection of the declining population on the farms; however, improved roads and convenient inexpensive personal transportation, coupled with attractive and comprehensive shopping areas in a city forty miles away, have enticed people to shop away from their own communities.

The schools in the towns of Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction occupy prominant places. In Lowery and Sunny Junction, single buildings house all grade levels, kindergarten through twelfth grades. In Temple, the high school, containing grades seven through twelve, is located in one building while the elementary grades are located in another, one block away. With the exception of the Temple Elementary School, which was built after the First World War, the other school facilities are relatively new. The core of the Sunny Junction complex was constructed during the early fifties; however, Superintendent Jones proudly shows off the recently constructed gymnasium, locker rooms, and shop to visitors. The Lowery school complex contains three units; an elementary school, a high school, and a gymnasium. Both the elementary and high school units were built during the past five years and feature contemporary design elegance and sophistication found in urban shopping malls. Regardless of the age or style of the building in the three districts, all show signs of continued maintenance and general good housekeeping.

Lining the corridors of each of the high schools are pictures of previous graduating classes arranged by graduation date. These group

pictures may span a period of seventy years or more; familiar family names appear regularly. The appearance of family faces and names reminds the present students that their ancestors were also once (and still are) part of the same school.

All three school districts enroll about the same number of students. Lowery counts 200, Temple lists 220, and Sunny Junction claims 250. Although the enrollments are fairly close, the superintendents view the differences as significant because the variation in enrollments reflects an important difference in state funding to and among the school districts.

Each of the districts has three administrators; a district superintendent, an elementary school principal, and a high school principal. In all three districts, the superintendents occupy offices in the high school section, and their offices are adjacent or very close to the offices of the high school principals. The elementary school principals have offices in their own units located some distance from the offices of both the superintendent and high school principal. In each district, one secretary serves the superintendent and also provides limited services to the principals.

None of the superintendents have teaching responsibilities; however, this is not the case with most of the school principals. All of the school principals with the exception of Mr. Foster, Principal of Sunny Junction High School, have some teaching obligations. Teaching assignments range from a high of about two-thirds of the school day in the case of Mr. Richards at Temple Elementary School, to a low of only several hours per day for a two month period for Mr. Charles, Principal at Sunny Junction Elementary School.

The three school districts have similar student grade level organizations. The elementary schools of Lowery and Sunny Junction are comprised

of grades kindergarten through eighth, while the high schools in these two districts have grades nine through twelve. In the Temple School District, grades kindergarten through sixth are housed in the elementary school complex, while grades seven through twelve are located in the high school complex. In spite of the fact that in the Temple District seventh and eighth grades attend the high school rather than the elementary school, all three of the districts are divided into two basic organizational units, elementary and secondary. None of the three districts identifies itself as having a middle or junior high school.

The organization of the instructional programs among the districts is similar. In the elementary schools, in grades kindergarten through sixth, the traditional self-contained classroom unit forms the organizational foundation for each school. The ability to have one teacher per grade level is viewed by the elementary school principals as a virtue. In the seventh, eighth and ninth through twelveth grades, the basic unit of instructional organization is the specialized class period. In all of the schools, students in grades seven through twelve move from teacher to teacher about once per hour for instruction in different subject areas.

Regardless of the type of instructional organization, class sizes in all three school districts are small by traditional standards. Among the schools and across the classes, the class sizes average about twelve students per teacher. The relatively few students in the schools and the comparatively small class sizes seem to produce a rather quiet, calm atmosphere in each of the schools. While the students are in classrooms, off the grounds, and out of the corridors, an unusual silence prevails in the schools. In the Lowery High School, when students are

in class, all that can be heard is the hum of the heating and ventilating system.

The principals, as might be expected, have some important responsibilities for the instructional programs in their respective schools. Typically the principals develop the school schedules. This is to say they assign grade levels or subjects to teachers, teachers to classrooms, and students to teachers and establish a time schedule to coordinate the various aspects of the school day. Largely, school schedules reflect traditional assignments and require little preparation time. However, if and when reduction-in-force (laying off staff due to declining enrollment and reductions in state funding) becomes imminent, the superintendents step in and make staff reassignments within the districts.

In addition to scheduling, the principals reluctantly evaluate teachers and somewhat less reluctantly, but nevertheless aggressively, discipline student for problems which arise in classrooms and in other parts of the school. The principals answer their own phones and type their own letters because they do not have personal secretaries. As might be expected, the principals secure teaching supplies and materials for teachers and respond to a variety of unanticipated situations. Such situations might include an injury to a student, a phone call from an upset parent, an unexpected visit from a community member, or the unannounced appearance of a salesman. Because they personally know all the parents of the students, the principals claim they have few problems with students and parents.

At Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction High Schools, the principals enthusiastically announce that instruction is only one of the important missions of their schools; the other is student activities. According

to the principals, student activities have two parts. One part revolves around school clubs (and other similar organizations) and their associated activities; the other part is concerned with interscholastic athletics.

Each of the high schools sponsors a variety of club and club-like organizations. Part of Sunny Junction's list includes Student Government, Future Farmers of America, Pep Club, Year Book, Thespians, Cheerleaders, Future Homemakers of America, Band, and class organizations for freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. At Sunny Junction, the high school principal expects that $17,000 will be received and spent on the activities of seventeen different student organizations. At Sunny Junction, Lowery, and Temple, it is the high school principal who oversees and coordinates the activities of the different student organizations.

Interscholastic athletics programs are taken seriously by the students, teachers, administrators, members of the boards of education, parents, and the community members in general. Numerous trophy cases containing literally dozens of shiny athletic trophies (with appropriate inscriptions) stand in the entry halls of the high schools and serve as a testimonial to the past and present importance of interscholastic sports. Both interscholastic sports for boys and girls are emphasized. Those for the boys include football (eight man), basketball, and track; the girls' sports include volleyball, basketball, and track. Among the sports, it is basketball which is taken most seriously by the school and community. Win-loss records, and league and tournament championships are regarded as exceedingly serious matters. Horror stories are told of coaches who failed to meet community expectations. Regretful stories

are recounted of successful coaches who were lured away by other districts. Recruitment and selection of basketball coaches is so critical that the superintendents report that they often share the responsibility of hiring coaches with their boards of education. Intense interest in basketball is universally explained by the school superintendents and principals by the statement: "It's the only show in town. What else is there to do during the cold dark winter months?"

The organization and coordination of public athletic events fall on the shoulders of the high school principals. The activities include scheduling and coordinating practices and gymnasium use, scheduling transportation for out-of-town games, and organizing home games. The latter includes making arrangements for publicity, ticket sales, facilities, athletic equipment, programs, crowd control, food service, and referees and score keepers. Following a given season, the principals secure trophies and awards (with appropriate inscriptions) and organize banquets for conferring of awards.

Within each of the three school districts, there are number of services which are provided which support and enrich the instructional and activity programs. These services include transportation of students to and from school and activities, food preparation and service to students during the regular school day and for certain activities, building and grounds maintenance and repair for the instructional program and the activities programs, and provision of a competent staff to organize and supervise the various instructional programs and student activities and to provide the variety of other services offered. It is the district superintendents who have responsibilities for supervising and coordinating these various services. It is important to note that not only do the superintendents

supervise and coordinate these services, but in emergencies they engage directly in the services themselves. Driving a bus, repairing a boiler, and occasionally substituting for a teacher are not unknown activities for superintendents Ritter, Wallace, and James.

There is a crucial aspect common to the three school districts which touchs all other aspects--instruction, student activity, interscholastic athletics, food services, building and grounds maintenance and repair, and provision for staff. This aspect is referred to by the superintendents as school finance. The flow of financial resources into and within the district organization affects every aspect of the school district organization. The superintendents of Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction readily assume unilateral responsibility for and control of financial resources within their respective school district organization. None of the superintendents has a district business manager; at most, each has a secretary-bookkeeper who can assist with preparing requests and reports.

Since basic school funding is determined by student enrollment, the superintendents monitor enrollments and adjust projections continually. Furthermore, since the funding formulas (based on student enrollments) are continually in a process of change, the superintendents closely watch the actions of the state legislature and state office of education for h[illegible]s of possible funding formula changes. In the state where the Lowery, Temple, and Sunny Junction school districts reside, voters may approve special levies for schools up to 10% of a district's annual budget. In the districts, it is the superintendents who negotiate with their boards regarding the amount of the levy and assume responsiblity for the successful passage of the yearly levies by voters.

As far as the distribution of financial resources within the organization is concerned, the superintendents assume tight control. Largely the distribution of financial resources is determined by salary schedules. It is the superintendents who negotiate with various employee organizations in the establishment of the schedules. Beyond the distribution of resources to salaries, resources are allocated for a variety of equipment, supplies, teaching materials, and services. Individuals in the district seeking resources for the purchase of items or services typically deal with the superintendents or through the principals to the superintendents. None of the principals has any budget allocation authority with respect to general district funds. The high school principals do, however, have responsiblity and control over the resources associated with student organizations.

With state formula funding for school districts comes state inspection. Hence, the superintendents are responsible for completing and forwarding a myriad of state requested reports. One superintendent noted that he has to complete 240 reports per year.

Other important responsibilities of the superintendent are "working with" the district board of education and representing the school district to the community in general and to local, regional, and state level organizations in particular. Each of the superintendents has established the position with the board that he is the chief school administrator and spokesman for the district. In this regard, the superintendents establish and prepare board meeting agenda and conduct meetings. The principals attend the board meetings irregularly and only speak when asked by superintendents to do so. The principals regard their superintendents as the "front man" and "PR" person for the district.

In each district, beyond the immediate community composed of students, parents, tax payers and others, are a variety of agencies and organizations that have interests in the district and to which the administrators must respond from time to time. The State Department of Education and its sub-agencies have been mentioned. Other agencies and organizations include school districts in the same athletic league, the Consolidated Counties School District Office, regional, state and national association for teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards, and the State Auditor's Office. Although these organizations require administrator time and attention, none require the time and attention demanded by the various segments of the local community, with the possible exception of the State Department of Education.

Theoretical Framework

One important purpose guiding the present study, as well as the other studies in the series, is the search for and/or development of a theoretical framework which is useful in relating the nature, distribution, and stabilization of the work of school administrators in general and the work of administrators who are employed in small, rural school districts in particular. At the present stage of progress in the series of research projects, James D. Thompson's work, Organizations in Action (1967), provides possibilities for formulating the theoretical framework mentioned above. In the following paragraphs, relevant aspects of Thompson's work coupled with the works of others are integrated and extended for the purpose of analyzing the field data in the present study. It should be noted that the theoretical framework presented below did not guide field data collection; it does, however, appear to provide a useful theoretical framework for organizing and analyzing the field data.

In analyzing complex organizations, it is useful to consider them as purposive, i.e., having goals, (Etzioni, 1975; Thompson, 1967) and to consider them in relation to their environments (Thompson, 1967). Considering only the formal organization (and not the organizational environment), complex organizations can be considered as consisting of three organizational levels of responsibility and control (Thompson, 1967). These levels include: (1) Technical; (2) managerial; and (3) institutional. The technical level involves one or more (likely a matrix) of core technical functions which involve the transformation of materials, human or nonhuman. The managerial level "...services the technical level suborganization" (Thompson, 1967, 10-11) by controlling, coordinating and supplying resources to the technical core functions and by mediating between technical core functions and the institutional level of the organization and those individuals and/or institutions who depend on the organization. Regarding the institutional level, Thompson (1967, 11) notes:

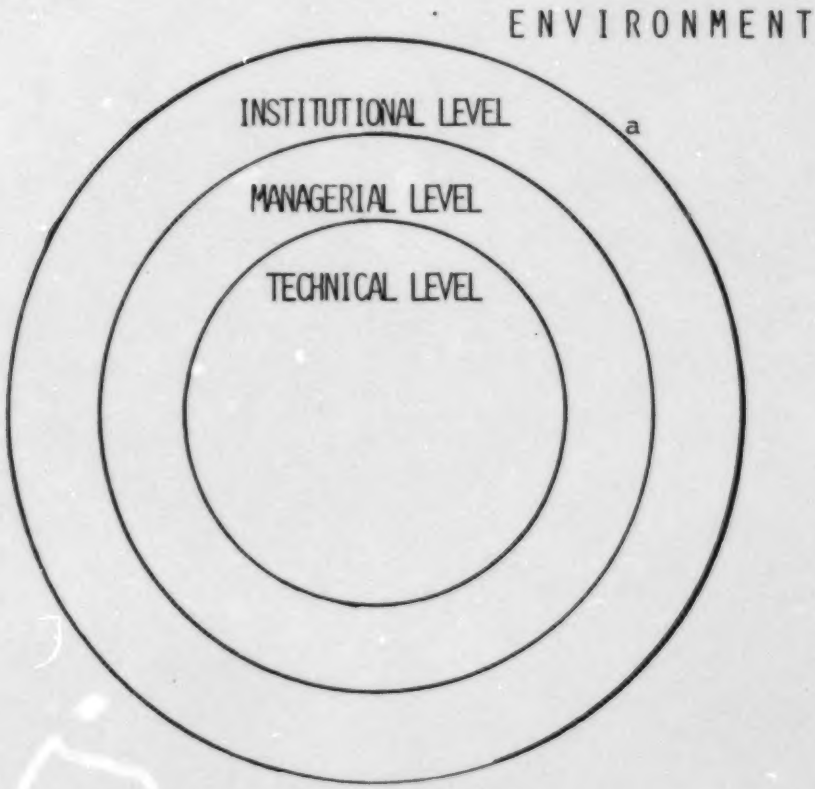
> ...the organization which consists of both technical and managerial suborganizations is also part of a wider social system which is the source of the "meaning," legitimation, or higher-level support which makes the implementation of the organization's goals possible. In terms of "formal" controls, an organization may be relatively independent; but in terms of the meaning of the functions performed by the organization and hence of its "rights" to command resources and to subject its customers to discipline, it is never wholly independent. This overall articulation of the organization and the institutional structure and agencies of the community is the function of the third, or institutional, level of the organization.

The three organizational levels may be thought of as represented by the spaces within three concentric circles (see Figure 1). The space within the inner circle represents the technical level. The space between the inner and middle circles represents the managerial level. The inner circle itself represents the boundary between the technical level and the managerial level. The space between the middle and outer circles represents the insitutional level. The middle circle itself represents the boundary between the managerial level and the institutional level. The space beyond the outer circle represents the organization's environment. The outer circle itself represents the boundry between the organization and the environment. A note of caution should be mentioned regarding the use of spaces within concentric circles to represent organizational levels. The representations discussed above and shown in Figure 1 are a simplification of the theoretical framework and, hence, must be employed with caution.

The discussion above implies and Figure 1 represents the fact that the managerial level completely surround the technical level, and the institutional level completely surrounds the managerial level. This may not always be the case. The technical level may have direct contact with the institutional level, and/or the management level may have direct contact with the organization's environment. Figure 2 represents the situation where the institutional level does not completely surround the managerial level giving the managerial level direct contact with the organization's environment.

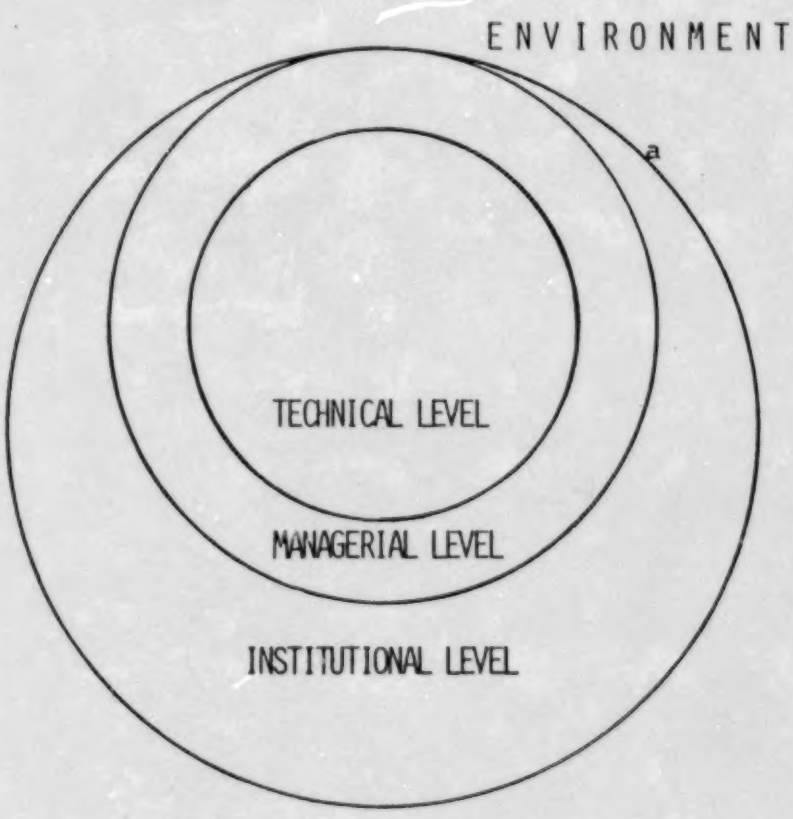
Cutting across organizational levels are what can be termed domains (Thompson, 1967). An organizational domain has an associated technological base (or bases), is supported by the managerial level, and is legitimated

FIGURE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS REPRESENTED BY SPACES WITHIN CONCENTRIC CIRCLES; ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES BETWEEN LEVELS REPRESENTED BY CONCENTRIC CIRCLES.



[a]THE SOLID LINES REPRESENT BOUNDARIES

FIGURE 2: THE SITUATION WHERE THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL DOES NOT COMPLETELY SURROUND THE MANAGERIAL LEVEL PRODUCING DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN THE MANAGERIAL LEVEL AND THE ORGANIZATION'S ENVIRONMENT.



[a]THE SOLID LINES REPRESENT BOUNDARIES

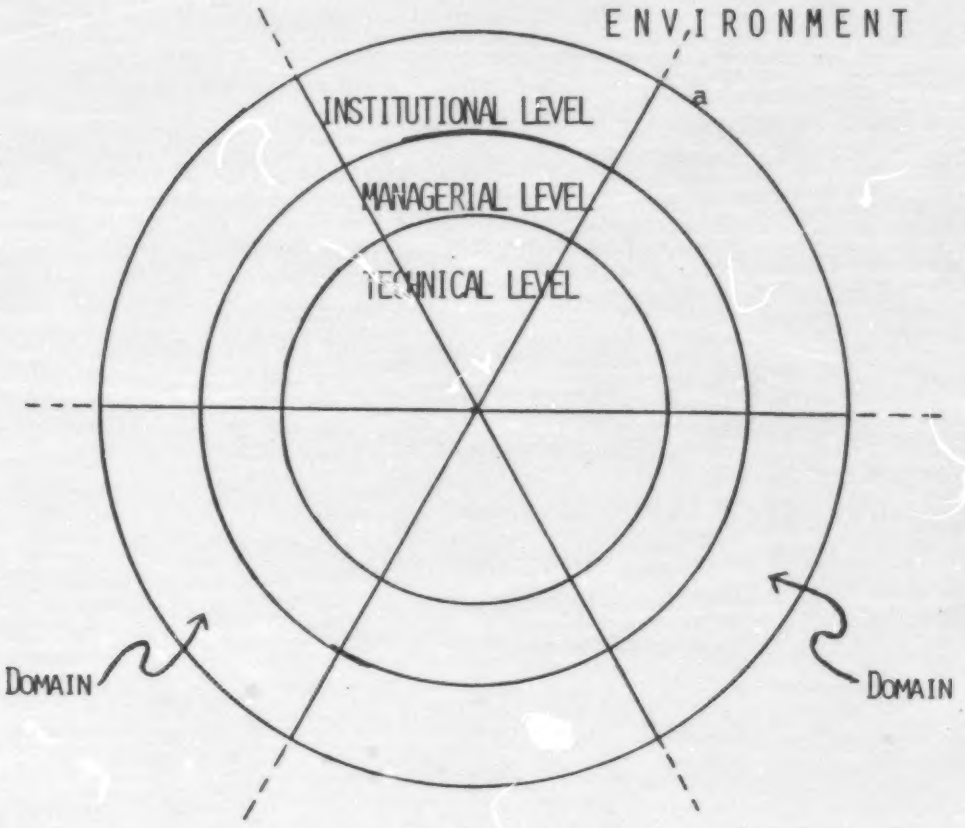
to the organization's environment by the institutional level at the organizational boundary. Boundaries among domains may not always be discrete because of the existence of interdependencies between and among domains which often make boundaries fuzzy.

Employing, again, the notion of the three organizational levels as being represented by the spaces within three concentric circles, an organization's domains can be represented by the spaces between several radii originating from the circles' common center and extending to the outer circle. Figure 3 represents an example of organizational domains in which the organization has six domains. The same caution stated above, needs repeating here. The representation of organizational domains, as discussed above and shown in Figure 3, is a simplification of the theoretical framework and must be employed with caution. For example, as shown in Figure 3, each domain is only in contact with two other domains. This may not always be the case; a domain may be in contact with more than two other domains.

Not all aspects of a complex organization's environment are relevant to the organization. Furthermore, only certain aspects of the environment are relevant to certain parts of the organization. Additionally, only certain aspects of the organization are relevant to certain parts of the environment. That part of an organization's environment which is relevant to a certain organizational domain and vice versa can be referred to as the task environment of the domain. Important exchanges exist between organizational domains and their associated task environments.

As is the case with organizational domains, the boundaries between task environments are not always completely clear. A task environment can have relevance to more than one domain, and more than one domain can have

FIGURE 3: ORGANIZATIONAL DOMAINS REPRESENTED BY SPACES BETWEEN RADII ORGINATING FROM THE COMMON CENTER OF THREE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES.



[a]THE SOLID LINES REPRESENT BOUNDARIES

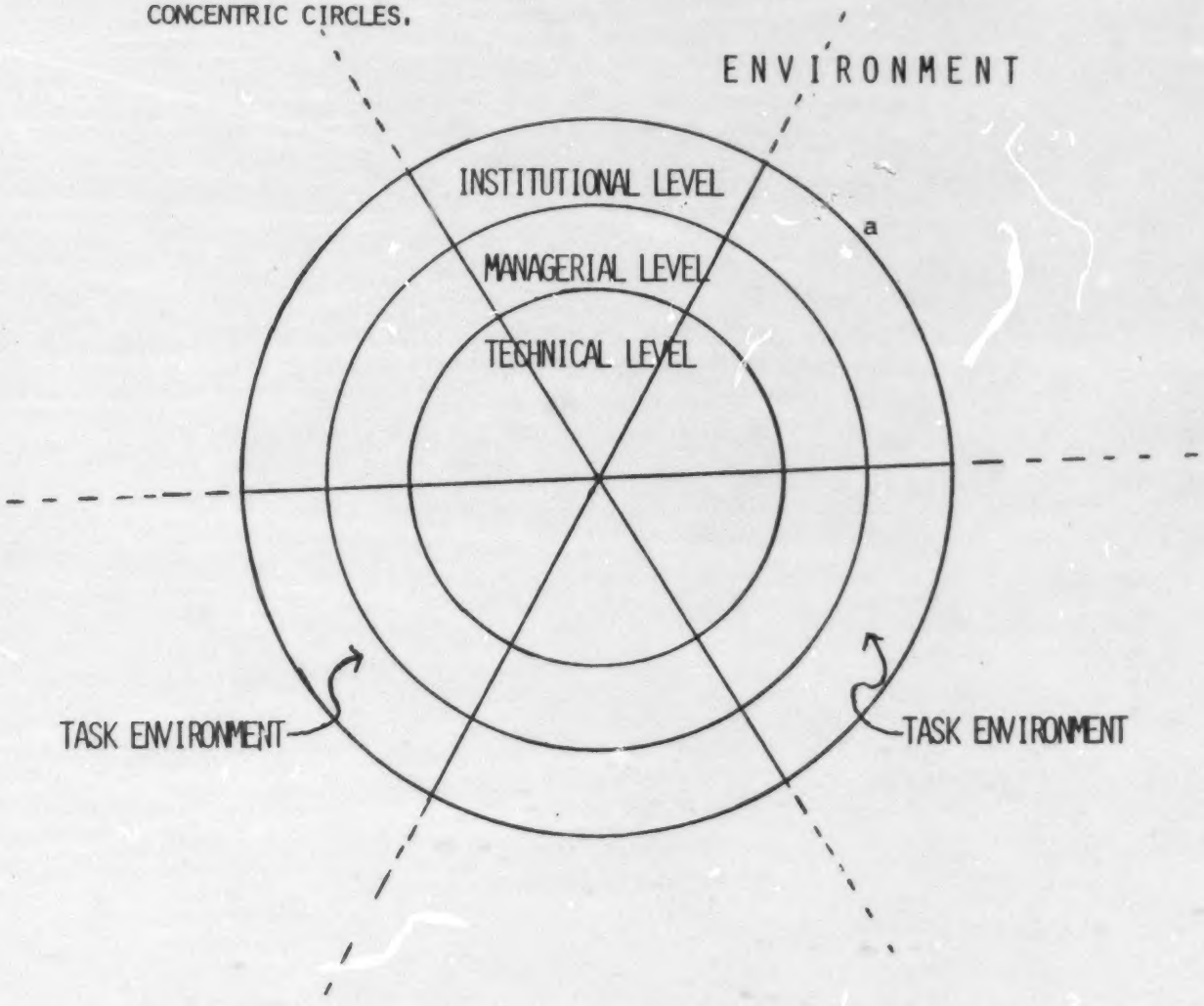
relevance to a task environment. Additionally, task environments can have important interdependencies.

Using the notion of the spaces within three concentric circles as representing organizational levels, and the spaces between radii originating from the circles' common center and extending to the edge of the outer circle as representing organizational domains, task environment can be represented by the spaces between extension of the radii beyond the outer circle (see Figure 4). As with the representations in previous figures, the representation in Figure 4 must be understood to be a simplification of the theoretical framework.

The primary activity of administrators is to coordinate exchanges between technical organizational levels and task environments and to respond to uncertainties which may disrupt the exchange relationships between organizational domains and their related task environments (Thompson, 1967). Coordinating the exchange among various technical units within a domain and between a domain and its task environments can take the form of standardization, planning, and mutual adjustment (March and Simon, 1957; Thompson, 1967). Responding to uncertainties which arise among various technical units within a domain and between a domain and its task environment take the form of buffering, leveling, forecasting, and adapting (Thompson, 1967).

Administrative activities can be viewed as being associated with particular organizationl domains and at certain organizational levels. A specific adminstrative position may be associated with multiple domains and levels. A task associated with an administrative position can be viewed as being a collection of activities associated with a certain organizational domain at a particular organizational level. The work associated with a

FIGURE 4: TASK ENVIRONMENTS OF AN ORGANIZATION REPRESENTED BY SPACES BETWEEN RADII ORGINATING FROM THE COMMON CENTER OF THREE CONCENTRIC CIRCLES.



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particular administrative position may be considered to be the sum of the tasks associated with that position.

Employing the theoretical framework presented above, the following section contains an analysis of the work of small, rural school administrators presented in the previous section.

Analysis

The work of school administrators can be viewed as being composed of a group of tasks. Each task consists of a collection of activities associated with an particular organizational level within a certain organizational dommain. Associated with each domain is a task environment. Before examining the work of the administrators by position and across positions, it will be useful first to consider the organizational domains in the school districts and their related task environments.

The three rural schools included in the study have three categories of domains. The first of these categories includes three domains. These are: (1) Instruction of students; (2) recreation for youth; and (3) entertainment for community members. Instruction of students takes its character primarily from teachers and students assuming their traditional classroom roles. Recreation for youth is manifest primarily in terms of high school student activities and providing athletic facilities and equipment for nonschool organized athletic activities. Entertainment for the community take its form in terms of public interscholastic athletic events. The task environments of the three categories of domains have their concentration in the schools' immediate communities; although, to be sure, the state has particular interests with regard to instruction, and neighboring school districts have interests with respect to entertainment.

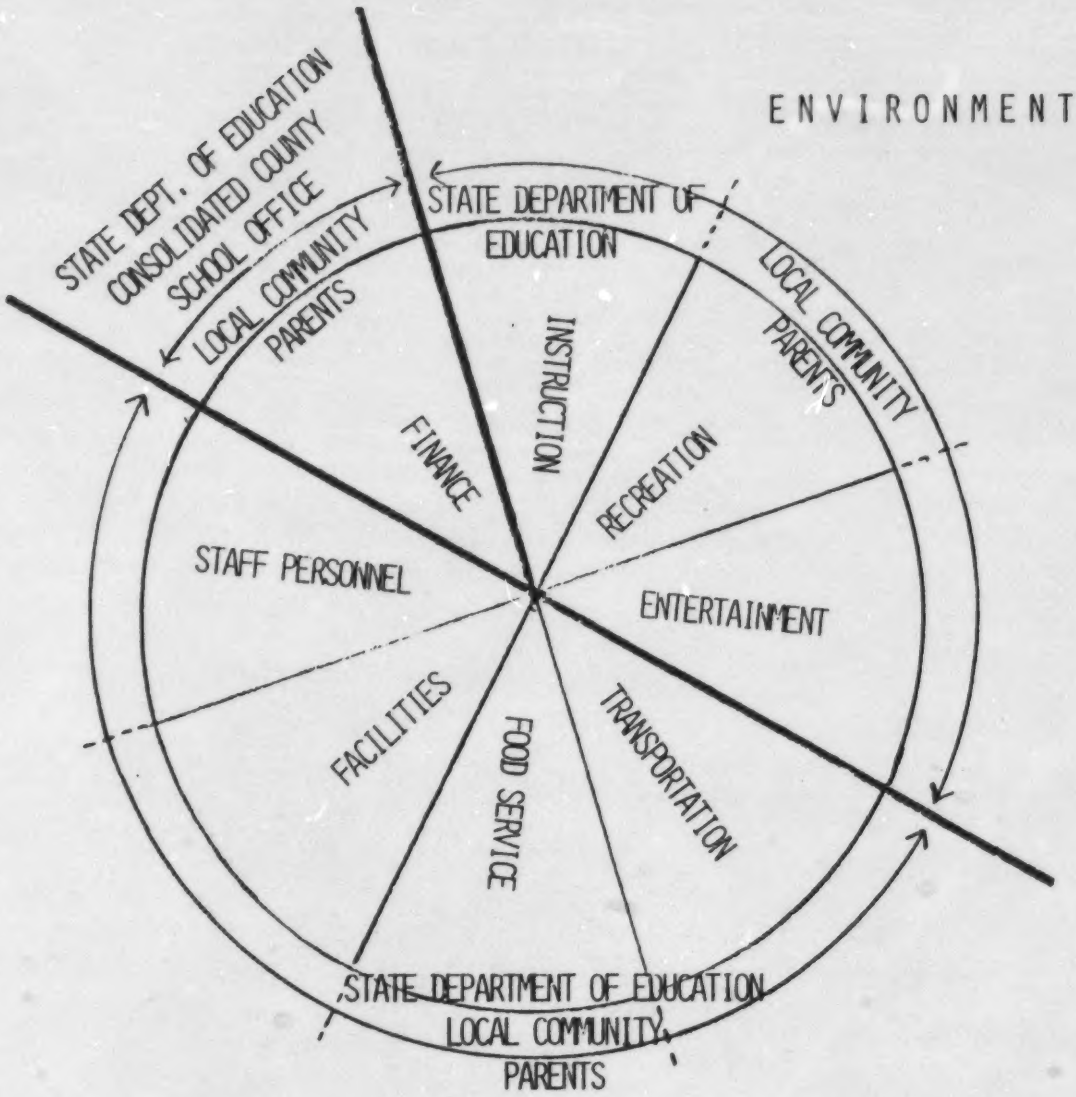
The second category includes four domains. These are: (1) Transportation for students; (2) food services for students and others; (3) facitities for students and community members; and (4) competent and reliable staff members to provide and organize instruction, recreation, and entertainment activities, and other service. Each of these domains can be viewed as supporting the first category of domains; instruction, recreation, and entertainment. Furthermore each of the four domains finds a relevant task environment located in the immediate community and the State Department of Education.

The third category of domains includes only one domain and this is the securing of, distribution of, and accounting for financial resources. Clearly this domain supports the seven previously mentioned domains. The domain which is concerned with financial resources finds relevance to two task environments; one is the taxpayers of the community, the other is the State Department of Education. The latter is more important to the school districts because they receive approximately 90% of their funding from the state.

Employing the previously presented representations of the theoretical framework (Figures 1, 2, & 4), the eight organizational domains and associated task environments of the three school districts included in the study are shown in Figure 5. For purposes of clarity, organizational levels are not shown.

The district organization of each of the rural school districts included in the study has eight interrelated domains. Each of the three types of administrative positions included in the study tends to be associated with certain domains and not others. The elementary school principalships are primarily associated with the instructional domain. The secondary school

FIGURE 5: THE EIGHT ORGANIZATIONAL DOMAINS AND ASSOCIATED TASKS ENVIRONMENTS OF THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS. ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS ARE NOT SHOWN.



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principalships are mainly associated with the recreational and entertainment domains and, to a lesser extent, the instructional domain. The superintendencies are associated with the domains of transportation, food service, facilities, staff personnel, and finance.

Within each of the domains, adminstrative activities may be spread across organizational levels or be concentrated at one level. The work associated with the elementary school principalships resides almost completely in the instructional domain. At the technical level, each principal engages in regularly scheduled instructional activities. At the managerial level, each principal is responsible for planning a school schedule and coordinating the flow of appropriate resources. At the same level, the principals are responsible for responding to and dealing with uncertainities which may arise from the technical level and the task environment. Within the instructional domain, the elementary school principals have few responsibilities at the institutional level. Occasionally they represent their schools at public occasions and at board meetings. Hence, the work of the elementary school principals can be viewed as consisting primarily of two tasks, instruction and the management of instruction.

The work associated with the secondary school principalship lies in three domains. Within the instructional domain at the technical level, two of the three principals are scheduled to provide one hour of instruction daily. Also within the instructional domain at the managerial level, the secondary school principals are expected to plan school schedules, coordinate resources, and respond to uncertainities which arise from the technical level and the task environment. Within the domain of instruction at the institutional level, the high school principals have few

responsibilities. They do on occasion represent their schools at board meetings and other public gatherings.

Within the domains of recreation and entertainment, the principals have no regular responsibilities at the technical level. Teachers are engaged to organize and supervise clubs and other student activities. Coaches are engaged to train and supervise student athletes for community entertainment events. At the managerial level, however, within the domains of recreation and entertainment, the principals have considerable responsibilities. These include scheduling the various and assorted student activities and athletic events. Similarly they must respond to a host of uncertainties which arise from activities and events and from the community as a response to the activities and events.

At the institutional level within the domains of recreation, the high school principals have few responsibilities. However, within the domain of entertainment, they play a rather prominant role. Each principal represents his school's teams at various meetings of athletic directors and serves as the symbolic leader of school athletics when presiding at athletic awards banquets.

In summary, the work associated with high school principalships can be considered to be composed primarily of four tasks: The management of instruction, the management of recreation, the management of entertainment, and the representation of entertainment.

Within the domains of transportation, food service, and facilities, the district superintendents play minor roles at the technical level. They may drive a bus in an emergency or make an emergency repair on a part of a building. However, within these three domains at the managerial level, superintendents have considerable responsibilities for coordinating the

technical levels and responding to difficulties which arise from coordination and task environments.

Within the domain of staff personnel, the superintendents at the technical level hire certified and noncertified staff members and negotiate with employee representatives regarding employee contracts. At the managerial level they directly supervise personnel in the domains of transportation, food service, and facilities. When reduction-in-force emerges as a possibility, they manage staff scheduling throughout the district organization.

Within the domain of school finance, the superintendents engage in a variety of technical level activities. These include enrollment forecasting, revenue predicting, and expense estimating. In short, the superintendents are responsible for the details of fiscal budget preparation. With respect to other technical activities associated with school finance, day-to-day accounting is handled in each district by a bookkeeper; monthy accounting services are provided by the Consolidated Counties School District Office. At the management level, the superintendents are responsible for the coordination and flow of financial resources between the district and its funding sources and among various divisions in the district. Uncertainities surrounding revenues are managed through conservative income estimates; uncertainities involving expenditures are managed by maintaining contingency reserve funds.

Regardless of domain, the superintendents have important responsibilities at the institutional level. It is fair to assert that the members of the board of education and most task environments regard the superintendent as <u>the expert</u> with regard to all aspects of the school district organization. Hence, the superintendents spend considerable time speaking

publicly, as well as privately, in support of and in defense of their district organizations.

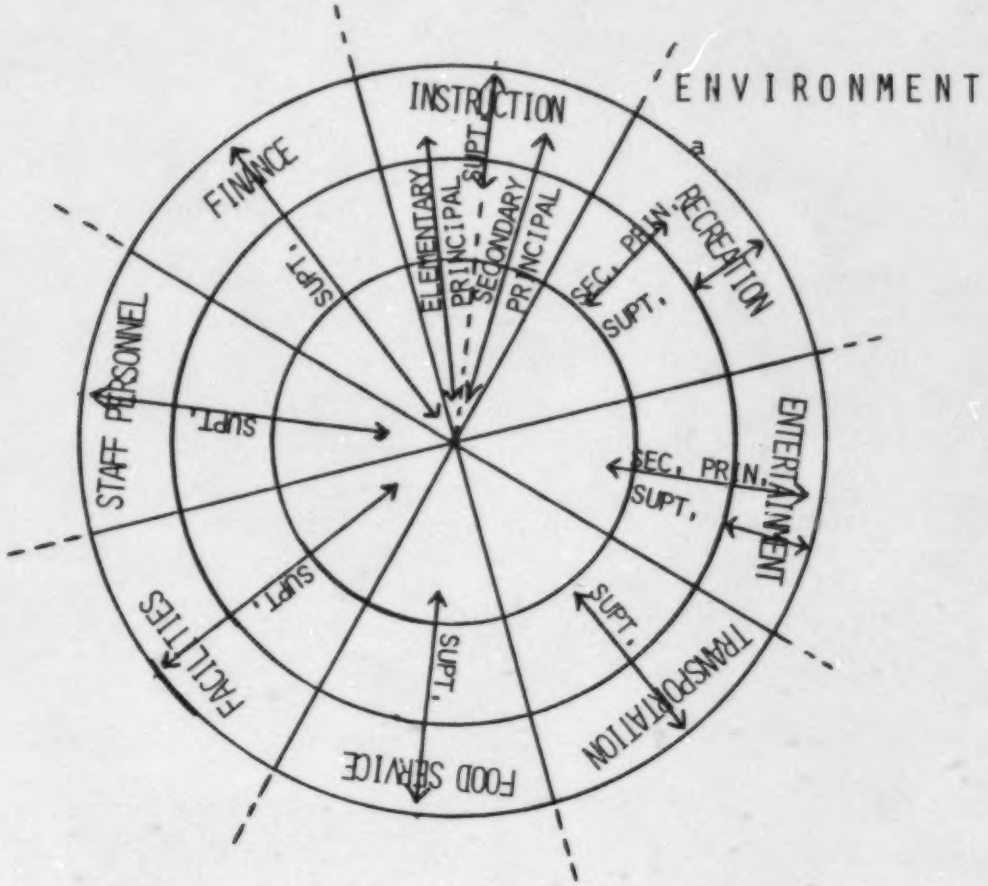
In summary, the work associated with the rural superintendency encompasses a variety of tasks. At the technical level superintendents have the task of negotiating employee contracts and selecting personnel for a variety of positions. At the managerial level they have the tasks of managing the district's transportation, food service, facilities, and certain aspects of staff personnel. At the institutional level they have the task of representing, supporting, and defending all organizational domains to all task environments.

Summary

The substantive part of the study has attempted to characterize the nature of the work within and among administrative positions in small, rural school districts. Furthermore, the study has attempted to identify both organizational and environmental factors which bring stability to the work of administrative positions. The concepts of organizational domain, organizational level, task environment and administrative task have been used to analyze field data.

Employing the representations of the theoretical framework as presented in Figures 1, 2, & 4, the tasks which comprise the work of the three categories of administrators (elementary school principal, secondary school principal, and district superintendent) are represented in Figure 6. In Figure 6, the tasks, associated with each administrative position across organizational levels and among organizational domains, are displayed. Task environment elements are not included for purposes of clarity.

FIGURE 6: TASKS (SHOWN BY LABELED ARROWS) WHICH COMPRISE THE WORK OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, AND DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS IN THREE SMALL, RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS ACROSS ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS AND AMONG ORGANIZATIONAL DOMAINS. REVELVANT TASK ENVIRONMENTS ARE NOT SHOWN.



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The concepts of organizational domain and organizational level appear to be useful in analyzing the character and division of the work of administrators. If organizational domain is held constant, then the following generalizations can be made: The work of the elementary school principal tends to be more at the technical rather than either the managerial or institutional levels. The work of the secondary school principal tends to be more concentrated at the managerial level than either the technical or institutional levels. And, the work of the district superintendent tends to be centered both at the managerial and institutional levels rather than the technical level.

If organizational level is held constant, then the following generalizations can be made: In terms of organizational domains, the elementary schools principal's work is less varied than either the high school principal's or the superintendent's work. Similarly, the high school principal's work is more varied than the elementary principal's work and less varied than the superintendent's work. And, finally, of the three administrative positions, the work associated with the position of superintendency is the most varied.

In general it can be said that work associated with the rural elementary school principalship contains little variety and is centered at the technical level of the school; that the work associated with the rural superintendency contains considerable variety and resides at both managerial and institutional levels; and that the work associated with the rural high school principalship, when compared to the elementary principalship and the district superintendency, contains an intermediate level of variety and is focused at the managerial organization level.

Continued Research

As noted in an earlier section, this paper represents an in-process report of a series of research projects devoted to developing a comprehensive understanding of the work and work arrangements of public school administrators in settings which are particularly suited for such studies. These settings are small, rural school districts.

An important focus of this paper has been the development of a theoretical framework useful for organizing and analyzing the field data as well as for guiding the collection and analysis of new field data. With the development and application of theoretical framework, it is important to propose further research steps.

One necessary next step is to attend to the reliability problem discussed in a previous section. With respect to the three sites included in this report, the reliability issue can largely be solved by completing the participant-observation field work at the two other sites.

Thus far in the progress of the research reported, most of the analyses have focused on structural features of the work and work arrangements of the school administrators included in the studies. A next research step needs to be an examination and analysis of the processes whereby the administrators individually and collaboratively conduct their work in their respective school districts. Such questions as, How do the administrators individually and collectively coordinate the activities within and among the technical levels of various domains? And, How do administrators individually and collectively respond to uncertainties springing from task environments and organizational domains? need to be addressed. In exploring the answers to these and similar questions, the stabilizing linkages among the administrators in a school between

administrators and staff members and between administrators and various individual and groups outside of the school district organization, will likely become apparent.

With further data collection and analysis, the utility of the theoretical framework presented in this paper can be tested. Further data collection and analysis will likely necessitate the alteration of the present theoretical framework to make it consistent with new data.

In the long run, it would be useful to extend the series of studies to an examination of the administration of small, rural school districts which are located in non-agrarian settings, for example, those located in lumbering and mining communities. Such sites would provide for contrasts and inquiry with respect to the relationships between the local communities and the school district organizations.

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